THE GREAT "MOKUSATSU" MISTAKE-"Was This the Deadliest Error of Our Time?" Coughlin, William J Harper's Magazine; Mar 1, 1953; 206, 1234; ProQuest pg. 31

# *The Great* Mokusatsu *Mistake*

## Was This the Deadliest Error of Our Time?

*William J. Coughlin*

FOR many months after the Japanese collapse in 1945, people wondered whether it was the atomic bomb or Russia's entry into the war that had brought to an end the fighting in the Pacific. But it gradually became clear that the importance of these two events in persuading Japan to surrender had been overrated; that Japan had been a defeated nation long before August 1945.

"The Japanese had, in fact, already sued for peace before the Atomic Age was announced to the world with the destruction of Hiroshima, and before the Russian entry into the war," Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz told Congress; and other American military leaders confirmed this report.

Why, then, did not Japan accept the Potsdam Declaration, which called upon Japan to surrender, when it was issued in late July of 1945, instead of waiting until the second week in August, after Hiroshima and Nagasaki had been blasted into radioactive rubble and the Russians had begun their drive into Manchuria? That question has never been satisfactorily answered.

The true story of Japan's rejection of the Potsdam Declaration *may* be the story of an incredible mistake—a mistake which so altered the course of history in the Far East that we shall never be able to estimate its full effect on our nation—a mistake which, ironically, was made by a Japanese and involved just one Japanese word.

I say that it "may be" because part of the actual truth lies buried in human motivations which will probably always puzzle historians. But another part of it is clearly demonstrable. Let me tell the story; then you can judge for yourself what really happened.

ROLL back the calendar to July 1945, when Germany had surrendered, Japan had been left to fight alone, and the American forces had moved in their relentless stepping-stone advance all the way to Okinawa. Out of the Potsdam Conference, held in defeated Germany, there came on July 26 the Potsdam Declaration, signed by the United States, Britain, and China: a demand that Japan surrender or be crushed.

The Allied world waited for Japan's answer. Two days later it came through Radio Tokyo and the Domei News Agency, the semi-official press association controlled by the Japanese government. The word flashed from Tokyo was that Premier Kantaro Suzuki and his cabinet had decided to "ignore" the Potsdam Declaration.

The rest is familiar history. Within three weeks the Japanese turned about and accepted the Potsdam terms. But in those three weeks two events took place which were to have a profound effect on the history of the world. Atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki—giving birth to the atomic age—and Russia declared war on Japan and sent her troops sweeping south and east into Manchuria and Sakhalin—thus vastly strengthening her position in the Far East.

Correspondents entering conquered Japan

*William J. Coughlin, a former United Press foreign correspondent covering the Pacific, first ran across the great* mokusatsu *mistake while he was doing research for his book,* Conquered Press, *and he has been painstakingly tracking down the evidence ever since.*

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a short time later had one question which they put to all important officials: Did the dropping of the bomb or the Russian entry into the war cause the surrender? The truth, they learned, was that neither event materially changed the outcome, that Japan in fact had been on the verge of collapse, that her leaders had been negotiating desperately for many weeks with the then neutral Russians in an effort to arrange a surrender—with terms if possible, unconditionally if not. But the question why, in view of these facts, Japan had rejected the Potsdam ultimatum in late July remained wide open.

The almost unbelievable fact seems to be this: the Japanese cabinet decided to accept the Allied ultimatum, but by mistake the Prime Minister made an announcement that was taken to mean just the opposite!

The man who first told me the fantastic story behind Japan's rejection of the Potsdam Declaration was Kazuo Kawai, who was then editor of the Nippon *Times,* the influential Tokyo newspaper which was the organ of the Japanese Foreign Office. During July and August 1945, Kawai had supplemented the coverage of his staff by personally spending several hours each day in the Foreign Office. From his diary and from his vivid memory of those dark, crowded days before the surrender, he drew a curious tale.

The Japanese cabinet—Kawai said—had already decided in favor of the Potsdam Declaration when Premier Suzuki was questioned about the ultimatum at a Tokyo press conference. The Premier told the Japanese newsmen that his cabinet was holding to an attitude of *mokusatsu,* a word that is difficult to translate directly into English. He meant that the cabinet was withholding comment on the ultimatum, that a decision was not yet to be announced. But the Domei News Agency, in translating Suzuki's statement into English for shortwave broadcast to the West, put the wrong meaning on *mokusatsu* and mistranslated it as "ignore." The Allied Powers—waiting for Japan's answer to Potsdam—were informed that the Suzuki cabinet was "ignoring" the surrender ultimatum. On the basis of this apparent rejection, the final effort to crush Japan was launched and the surrender came nearly three weeks later, *after* the atomic bombs had been dropped and Russia had entered the war.

If true, the implications of Kawai's story were staggering. For if Japan had surrendered in July, the atomic bombs would never have been unleashed and, more important, the surrender would have cut off Russia's declaration of war, leaving the Soviets a much less effective power in the postwar world of the Far East than they are today.

Could this small mistake of just one word have blocked a Japanese surrender in July? And once made, could it not have been corrected?

Weeks of research into captured Japanese documents and into the diaries and memoirs of Japanese officials have confirmed Kawai's story, though there is some room for argument as to why the mistake was not corrected. Here for the first time is a step-by-step report on that mistake, the strange account of the word that may have changed the world.

## II

By the spring of 1945 there was no question in the minds of Japan's leaders that their nation had been badly beaten. But the military high command refused to lay down the sword and pledged itself to a fight to the death in the name of the Emperor. Opposed to the army stood a small group of diplomats whose chief concern was to prevent in Japan the last-ditch resistance which had brought annihilation to Germany and her disappearance as a political unit.

The plight of the nation was so desperate that the actual figures were kept secret even from some of the cabinet ministers. Japan's industrial complex had crumbled under the aerial assault. Steel production was down 79 per cent, aircraft production down 64 per cent. By September a lack of aluminum would halt the building of planes entirely.

Allied air attacks were destroying railroads, highways, and bridges faster than they could be replaced. Hundreds of thousands of bodies were buried in the smoking ruins of cities and towns. Millions were homeless. In Tokyo alone, almost half of the homes had been leveled. People were fleeing the cities. A combination of American surface, air, and undersea attack had cut off shipments from the occupied regions on which Japan depended for her life. Food was running out.

American planes destroyed the last of

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Japan's fleet in a battle off Kyushu on the very day in April when Suzuki took office. The aged Premier was an admiral without a navy.

"We must stop the war at the earliest opportunity," he said when he learned the true condition of his nation's war potential. The *jushin,* the senior statesmen, had advised the Emperor in February of 1945 that surrender was necessary *no matter what the cost.*

A small group of diplomats worked quietly behind the scenes to bring this about. The "peace party" included Prince Takamatsu, younger brother of the Emperor, one-time Foreign Minister Mamoru Shigemitsu, Prince Konoye, and Marquis Koichi Kido, who as lord keeper of the privy seal was the Emperor's closest adviser.

With the utmost caution, they sought to convert others to the cause of peace. It should be noted that the fact that these men were working for a surrender did not mean they all recanted or repented the doctrines which led to Pearl Harbor; rather, as shrewd diplomats, they realized that the tide of battle had turned and that Japan now stood to lose more by fighting to the finish than she did by surrendering. The army meanwhile was pinning its hopes on a single brief and bloody encounter with the Allied invasion forces, and the peace advocates were forced to move with extreme care lest the military discover their design.

For the army wielded extraordinary power within the Japanese government. The Supreme Command was subordinate only to the Emperor, which meant in fact that it took orders from no one, and by refusing to approve the appointment of a war minister, the army could block the formation of any cabinet.

The situation in the Suzuki cabinet when it took power in April 1945 is worthy of rather thorough examination, for it was at that time that the maneuverings of the peace party became more open.

The four key posts in the cabinet were those of the prime minister, the foreign minister, and the ministers of navy and war. Foreign Minister Togo and Navy Minister Yonai definitely were supporters of the peace movement. The War Minister, General Anami, was determined that the war should continue, while Prime Minister Suzuki wavered between peace and war. The members of the peace party concentrated their efforts on the Prime Minister, hoping thus to outnumber Anami by a decisive three to one.

Suzuki also was the key to the Supreme War Council. This was made up of the four men mentioned above plus the chiefs of staff of the army and navy. These were General Umezu and Admiral Toyoda, ambitious career officers devoted to the vigorous prosecution of the war.

Prior to May 1945 the vice chiefs of staff and the directors of the military affairs bureaus of the army and navy as well as the young officers of the secretariat also attended the Council meetings, but from that month on the deliberations of the Council became secret. This was a major victory for those working for peace since it cut the Supreme War Council off from much of the most fanatic military influence. If Suzuki could be converted to peace, it would divide the Council three for peace (Suzuki, Togo, and Yonai) and three against (Anami, Umezu, and Toyoda) thereby neutralizing it—a great stride toward bringing about a surrender.

The peace adherents achieved these two objectives, control of the cabinet and neutralization of the Supreme War Council, when Emperor Hirohito joined the peace faction in persuading Suzuki that further resistance was hopeless. This, together with the nation's industrial collapse, swung the wavering old admiral to the side of peace.

The militarists however begged for more time, arguing that they were about to win a decisive battle which would bring more favorable terms in the negotiations. The war minister promised the cabinet that the Americans would be driven off Okinawa. When that island fell, the army insisted it would win the coming battle on the invasion beaches of Japan itself.

But the peace party was impatient with the unwarranted claims of the ultranationalists. And so secret conversations with the Soviet Union, seeking Russian good offices in arranging a peace, were opened in June.

On June 3 former Prime Minister Hirota, one-time ambassador to Moscow, called on the Russian ambassador Jacob Malik at the hot spring resort of Hakone, where they talked in the utmost

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secrecy to prevent reprisals by the Japanese secret police. Malik was cool toward the proposals, and when Hirota later attempted to renew the conversation the Soviet ambassador pleaded illness and refused to see him.

At this point Kido, the Emperor's closest adviser and one of the leaders of the peace party, decided the time was ripe to press at once for a surrender. He drew up a memorandum setting forth in strong terms the necessity for ending the war immediately. It urged that an envoy be sent to Moscow with a personal message from the Emperor asking for peace. Kido discussed his plan with the Emperor on June 9.

"I fully reported to His Majesty on my tentative peace plan and obtained Imperial sanction to consult the prime minister, and the three ministers—war, navy, and foreign affairs—upon it," Kido recalls. "His majesty, who was as deeply concerned as anybody else over the adverse developments of the war situation, was satisfied with my memorial, especially since His Majesty grieved that many medium and small towns were reduced to ashes by bombing attacks one after another in quick succession, with a large number of innocent people being rendered homeless. His Majesty commanded me to set my hand to the tentative peace plan immediately."

Kido, after discussing his scheme with Prince Konoye, took it up with Prime Minister Suzuki, Foreign Minister Togo, Navy Minister Yonai, and War Minister Anami. Even fiery Anami now admitted the necessity of bringing the war to a close.

Toshikazu Kase, the American affairs expert in the Foreign Office who later was to be among those sent to sign the surrender document aboard the *Missouri* in Tokyo Bay, also was consulted on the memorandum. He warned that the government should prepare the home front for the worst—unconditional surrender.

On June 18 the Supreme War Council met in secret and agreed that steps should be taken "to ascertain the Soviet attitude by the beginning of July with a view to terminating the war if possible by September." The war minister and the chiefs of staff, after much argument, agreed to this decision.

Why were the peace offers made to Moscow? Because the Japanese—still hoping to obtain better terms than unconditional surrender (although resigned to that if necessary)—did not consider direct negotiations with the United States and Great Britain feasible at this stage. Any direct proposal except unconditional surrender, they felt, would meet with a rebuff which would cost the peace party so much face it would lose everything it had gained at this precarious point.

Russia, as the most powerful and most interested of the neutral powers, was felt to be the channel offering the greatest chance of success. The Japanese, of course, had no way of knowing that Joseph Stalin had promised at Yalta in February to enter the Far Eastern war after the defeat of Germany.

Hirota conferred twice more with Malik, who remained cold to the proposals.

"If Russia agrees to mediate, what will Japan do for Russia?" demanded the Soviet ambassador. The Russians continued to stall.

On July 7 the Emperor urged Premier Suzuki to more haste in the peace negotiations and said: "We may miss a precious opportunity while we are trying to ascertain the attitude of the Soviet Union." He suggested that a peace envoy be dispatched at once to Moscow.

The Supreme War Council agreed and on July 12 the Emperor entrusted Prince Konoye with the peace mission. Konoye's instructions were to end the war at any cost. He was to fly in secret to a remote Manchurian airfield and there board a Russian plane for Moscow. But Premier Stalin and Foreign Commissar Molotov begged off, saying they were busy preparing for the trip to Potsdam.

Premier Stalin mentioned casually to President Truman at Potsdam that the Japanese had broached the subject of negotiations. But the Soviet dictator said the Russians had brushed them off as obviously insincere. According to Secretary of State James F. Byrnes, the President expressed his approval of the Soviet dictator's action.

"Japan had lost the war before the atom bomb—before Russia's entry," says Hisatsune Sakomizu, who was cabinet chief secretary under Suzuki. "Why did Russia refuse to mediate? Why did Russia smother all our efforts for many months to make peace? Was it a dark plan to keep the war going until they were ready to get into it at the last minute—with the results we can all now see only too well?"

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## III

THE Potsdam Declaration was issued on July 26, 1945. It was signed by the United States, Great Britain, and (to the surprise of the Japanese) China. The reaction among Japanese leaders was one of exultation. The terms were far more lenient than had been expected. The Japanese were quick to note that instead of demanding unconditional surrender from the *government*, the last item of the proclamation called upon the government to proclaim the unconditional surrender of the *armed forces*.

The document also promised that Japan would not be destroyed as a nation, that the Japanese would be free to choose their own form of government, that sovereignty over the home islands would be returned to them after occupation, that they would be allowed access to raw materials for industry, and that Japanese forces would be allowed to return home.

Most important of all, the phrasing of the proclamation hinted strongly that the Emperor would be left on the throne, the one point which had been of most concern to the cabinet in all its discussions of surrender. The Japanese were expected to read between the lines, which they very quickly did.

Upon receiving the text of the proclamation, the Emperor told Foreign Minister Togo without hesitation that he deemed it acceptable. The full cabinet then met to discuss the Allied ultimatum. This dramatic session was the climax toward which the members of the peace party had been working for so long.

"It was as if the possibility of peace suddenly emerged into sight," Kase, the American expert in the Foreign Office, remembers.

I have searched through a number of Japanese accounts of this important cabinet meeting. All agree that the cabinet did not intend to reject the Potsdam Declaration. The decision on that hot July 27 was for peace.

The majority of the cabinet agreed that negotiations with the Allies should be opened on the basis of the attractive Potsdam terms while, as expected, War Minister Anami and the chiefs of staff argued violently against acceptance.

"We must issue a point-by-point rebuttal of the Potsdam document," they shouted. But other members of the cabinet overruled them.

DESPITE the fact that the cabinet members were considering acceptance of the Potsdam terms, they could not at first decide whether the news of the Allied proclamation should be released to the Japanese public. Foreign Minister Togo, anxious to prepare the people for the surrender, argued for four hours for its prompt release to the press. At six in the evening he won his point over strong army objections and late that night the declaration was released to the newspapers. Even more significantly, the cabinet ordered the papers not to criticize the Allied ultimatum editorially. The proclamation was censored mildly to remove some of the strong wording, thus making it appear even more lenient to the Japanese public than it was.

Although the way thus was prepared for an announcement of acceptance of the Potsdam terms, there were several complications. What about the surrender negotiations then under way with the Russians, the plan to send Prince Konoye to Moscow? The Japanese were becoming aware that the Russians were stalling deliberately, but the latest proposal had been sent to Moscow only two days before. Should the Potsdam Declaration be accepted at once or should an answer from the Russians be awaited?

"We should accept this now," argued Togo.

But there was another factor which the cabinet also was forced to consider. As yet the Japanese had received news of the statement of Allied policy at Potsdam only through their radio listening posts. It was not addressed to their government and the ultimatum had not yet reached them through official channels. Could the cabinet act on the basis of such unofficial information?

"After mature deliberation the hastily convened cabinet decided to keep silence for a while about the Potsdam proclamation pending further developments," says Kase.

The delay in announcing acceptance of the Allied terms was not expected to be long, but Prime Minister Suzuki was to meet the very next day with the press. The Japanese newsmen undoubtedly would question him about the proclamation. What should he say?

Hiroshi Shimomura, president of the powerful Board of Information—counterpart of Germany's propaganda ministry—and a mem-

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ber of the cabinet, recalls in his account of this fateful session that it was decided that the prime minister, if asked, should treat the subject lightly.

"This was to be done in order not to upset the surrender negotiations then under way through Russia," says Shimomura.

Premier Suzuki was to say merely that the cabinet had reached no decision on the Allied demands and that the discussion was continuing. Although the policy was to be one of silence, the very fact that the cabinet did not reject the ultimatum at once would make it clear to the Japanese people what was in the wind.

"The government had no intention of rejecting the Allied demands," says Kawai, who as editor of the Nippon *Times* was watching closely every move made by the cabinet at this crucial stage. "The cabinet planned to open negotiations on the basis of the Potsdam terms and would have accepted them."

That then was the situation when Premier Suzuki met the following day with the press. The cabinet was ready to accept the Potsdam terms but was withholding an immediate announcement to that effect for two reasons: to discover whether Russia planned to answer Japan's latest plea for mediation, and to await arrival of the Allied ultimatum through official channels. Indeed the fact that Stalin and Molotov had been at Potsdam made it seem to the Japanese that the United States and Great Britain might intend Russia as the channel for negotiations.

## IV

When Premier Suzuki confronted the press on July 28, he said that the cabinet was holding to a policy of *mokusatsu*. The word *mokusatsu* not only has no exact counterpart in English but it is ambiguous even in Japanese. Suzuki, as we know, meant that the cabinet had decided to make no comment on the Potsdam proclamation, with the implication that something significant was impending. But the Japanese were tricked by their own language. For in addition to meaning "to withhold comment," *mokusatsu* may also be translated as "to ignore."

The word has two characters in Japanese. *Moku* means "silence" and *satsu* means "kill," thus implying in an absolutely literal sense "to kill with silence." This can mean—to a Japanese—either to ignore or to refrain from comment.

(The word Suzuki should have used was *mokushi*. The character *shi* means "to observe" and in Japanese the phrase "to observe silence" can be taken only one way. Then there could have been no possibility whatsoever of a mistranslation of the word.)

Unfortunately the translators at the Domei News Agency could not know what Suzuki had in mind. As they hastily translated the prime minister's statement into English, they chose the wrong meaning. From the towers of Radio Tokyo the news crackled to the Allied world that the Suzuki cabinet had decided to "ignore" the Potsdam ultimatum.

The cabinet was furious at Suzuki's choice of words and the subsequent error by Domei. The reaction of Kase, who had fought long and hard for peace, was one of dismay.

"This was a piece of foolhardiness," he says. "When I heard of this I strongly remonstrated with the cabinet chief secretary, but it was too late. . . . Tokyo radio flashed it—to America! The punishment came swiftly. An atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima on August 6 by the Allies, who were led by Suzuki's outrageous statement into the belief that our government had refused to accept the Potsdam proclamation."

But for this tragic mistake, Kase laments, Japan might have been spared the atomic attack and the Russian declaration of war.

"I was listening to the radio and I heard that Suzuki had used the word *mokusatsu* at a press conference," recalls Nobuya Uchida, a former wartime cabinet minister, in his memoirs. "I was surprised to hear this news. Why were we sending Prince Konoye to Russia? The result was utilized by the Allies; the atomic bomb was dropped and Soviet Russia entered the war against Japan."

The army was delighted with the blunder and started to work at once to capitalize on it. Foreign Minister Togo discovered with alarm that Anami, the war minister, was urging the press to interpret *mokusatsu* as "rejection by ignoring" and that Anami had even talked the head of the Board of Information, Shimomura, into preparing a radio broadcast interpreting the word in that sense. The Foreign Minister quickly blocked Anami's

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crafty plans and brought him back into line.

"That Togo was able to have these unauthorized activities immediately stopped indicates clearly enough what the government's real attitude was," Kawai notes.

Kase says Suzuki's statement about the proclamation "should have meant simply that we refrained from commenting on it. To state expressly that we would ignore the proclamation was entirely contrary to the purpose of the decision. Such was the penalty of having an inexperienced man at the head of the government."

The fault for the error lies indeed as much with Suzuki for choosing a word with such an ambiguous meaning as with the Domei translators who put the phrase into English with such disastrous results. The elderly prime minister himself later lamented his unfortunate choice of such a word.

BUT to those within Japan who read correctly all the signs of the government's intention to accept the Potsdam ultimatum there was no question of Suzuki's meaning.

The stock exchanges, long quiet, suddenly became active after Suzuki's statement. The securities of two of the largest shipping concerns, Nippon Yusen Kaisha and Osaka Syosen Kaisha, climbed sharply that very same day. Significantly the gains on the stock exchanges were greatest in the quotations of peacetime industries such as textiles, tobacco, paper, and beer. Peace was believed to be at hand.

But let us turn to the world outside Japan —which could not see the internal signs which made it so clear that Suzuki was trying to say surrender was near.

What the Allies had in answer to their ultimatum was a blunt statement that Japan was "ignoring" the Potsdam Declaration, for that was what Japan's own propaganda agencies, Radio Tokyo and the Domei News Agency, had rushed to broadcast to the world in English without stopping to reflect on the implications of the word *mokusatsu*.

What then took place in the United States is a matter of record. The immediate significance given to the broadcast—indeed to the very word—is clear from the six-column banner headline on page one of the *New York Times* of July 28, 1945: "FLEET STRIKES AS TOKYO 'IGNORES' TERMS."

The Associated Press dispatch in the *Times* began:

"The semi-official Japanese Domei News Agency stated today the Allied ultimatum to surrender or meet destruction would be ignored. . . ."

The *Times* followed this with another front-page story two days later which began:

"Premier Kantaro Suzuki has put the official Japanese stamp of rejection on the surrender ultimatum issued to Japan by the United States, Great Britain, and China, declaring that 'so far as the Imperial Government of Japan is concerned it will take no notice of this proclamation. . . .'"

In official quarters the reaction to Suzuki's statement was just as severe and of even greater import, for President Truman had received word at Potsdam that the New Mexico test of the atomic bomb on July 16 had been highly successful. One of the reasons motivating the Potsdam ultimatum was to offer the Japanese a last chance to escape the rain of atomic death.

The late Henry L. Stimson, U. S. Secretary of War from 1940 to 1945, made it very clear in his report on the final decision to use the atom bomb (*Harper's,* February 1947) that the *mokusatsu* blunder led directly to the atomic attack on Hiroshima. "On July 28," wrote Secretary Stimson, "the Premier of Japan, Suzuki, rejected the Potsdam ultimatum by announcing that it was 'unworthy of public notice.' In the face of this rejection we could only proceed to demonstrate that the ultimatum had meant exactly what it said. . . . For such a purpose the atomic bomb was an eminently suitable weapon."

President Truman's announcement to the world on August 6, 1945, of the dropping of the atomic bomb confirms this, for he also cited the Suzuki "rejection" of the Potsdam terms.

"It was to spare the Japanese people from utter destruction that the ultimatum of July 26 was issued at Potsdam. Their leaders promptly rejected that ultimatum," the President said.

There can be no question that the tragic *mokusatsu* blunder, taken by the Allies as rejection of the Potsdam terms, brought atomic destruction showering down on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. But worse was yet to come.

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Russia, while stalling the surrender attempts of the Japanese, was rushing troops eastward from the European theater to the Manchurian frontiers. The atomic attacks sent the Russians pouring headlong into the conflict a week ahead of their timetable.

Japanese intelligence had reported the ominous buildup of Red forces along the Manchurian frontier, and the Japanese ambassador in Moscow had been trying repeatedly to obtain an audience at the Kremlin following the return of Stalin and Molotov from Potsdam. His requests had been met with a frigid silence.

But on August 8 Ambassador Sato received a telephone call summoning him to the palace, where he was ushered into Molotov's study. The foreign commissar—in obvious high spirits—brushed aside the courteous inquiries of the Japanese ambassador concerning the trip to Germany and began reading aloud the Russian declaration of war on Japan.

The Soviet Union based its declaration on Suzuki's supposed rejection of the Potsdam ultimatum. "The demand of the three powers, the United States, Great Britain, and China, on July 26 for the unconditional surrender of the Japanese armed forces was rejected by Japan, and thus the proposal of the Japanese government to the Soviet Union on mediation in the war in the Far East loses all basis," said the official Russian text.

The Japanese were shocked that the Russians, who were so well aware of Japan's desperate desire to surrender, should plunge into the war citing Suzuki's statement. Stalin, as we now know, had his own good reasons for rushing into the Far Eastern conflict. In order to lay claim to the territorial plums he had been promised at Yalta, he had to enter the war before the Japanese empire crumbled of its own dead weight. The *mokusatsu* blunder not only gave Stalin the time he needed to prepare the attack but provided the perfect excuse.

"We had asked for an olive branch and received a dagger thrust," laments Kase.

The Soviet troops crashed through the rotting Kwantung army into Manchuria and also struck southward on the island of Sakhalin. They broke over the Hingan range and boiled swiftly down the far side to capture Harbin, key city of central Manchuria. Strong mobile forces raced across the Gobi desert to Southern Manchuria. Their objective was to isolate Manchuria and then Korea. The Red advance swirled onward even after the Japanese surrender. For days the Japanese begged General MacArthur to stop the Russians. Then on August 24—ten full days after Japan surrendered—the Soviet armies rolled to a halt. When the dust of battle settled, Russia had mightily strengthened her position in the Far East.

## V

WHY did the Japanese government allow the *mokusatsu* error to stand uncorrected? Why was there no challenge of a mistake of such disastrous consequence? Here we enter the realm of conjecture. What I offer now is factual as to events, but inevitably to some degree hypothetical as to motives.

My hypothesis rests upon the gravity of terrible hazards faced by those who were working for peace. The politically prominent members of the peace party had shifted the site of their secret conclaves constantly, always dreading detection by the police.

Often they had gathered in the Diet building where they could escape the army's vigilance. Sometimes they had met even during air raids because the secret police were less likely to be in evidence then.

The army at this time was arresting scores of "peacemongers." High office was no protection against seizure by the military fanatics who lashed out at all who opposed them. Those jailed included the president of one of Japan's largest motion picture companies, a former attorney general, and the man who is now prime minister of Japan, Shigero Yoshida. Hirota's talks with Malik were held in secret outside Tokyo to escape this very vigilance.

It had taken months, even years, of undercover work for the peace faction to bring itself to the peak of power which it held at the time of the important cabinet meeting on July 27. The situation teetered in a precarious balance with the brash young officers of the army and navy barely under control. The decision that the Allied terms were favorable was to have been the end of a long and extremely dangerous road for the men in Japan's government who sought to end the war.

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Then the aged premier and the Domei News Agency, by unwittingly appearing to fling a challenge to the Allied world, restored the balance of power to the militarists. The Allied attitude stiffened and the strategic situation of Japan's peacemakers swiftly deteriorated. They dared not cry out in protest. The loss of face they suffered as a result of the Suzuki statement was difficult to withstand but it was not just to save face that they remained silent—it was to save their lives.

Only after the dropping of the atomic bombs and the Russian entry into the war could they again wrest control of the government from the military, and then only with extreme difficulty. The events which took place during the final surrender in August would seem to bear witness to this interpretation.

THE end came on August 14 at a dramatic conference crowded into a sweltering underground bomb shelter. The Emperor decided over the objections of War Minister Anami and the chiefs of staff that unconditional acceptance of the Allied terms would be broadcast as soon as possible. Such Imperial intervention was unprecedented. Hirohito was in tears as he made his statement, while the members of the Supreme War Council and the entire cabinet were sobbing loudly.

But even the express orders of Hirohito were not enough to hold the military fanatics in line. A phonograph record of the Imperial Surrender Rescript which the Emperor wished to broadcast to the nation the next day was made at the palace about midnight.

Young officers of the army broke into open insurrection against the surrender and many members of the peace party narrowly escaped with their lives in this last-minute uprising. Suzuki, Yonai, and Togo were denounced as traitors. A bomb was thrown into the foreign minister's residence.

The first objective of the rebels was seizure of the phonograph record made by the Emperor. By this, they hoped to prevent announcement of the Imperial decision.

When the commander of the Imperial Guard Division, General Mori, refused to cooperate with the leaders of the rebellion he was shot to death instantly and his aide was cut down with a sword. Fanatic young officers —among them Major Koga, nephew of General Tojo—forged an order for the Imperial Guard Division to disarm the palace police, barricade the palace gates, and cut off communication with the outside.

Cabinet Minister Shimomura and three executives of the Japan Broadcasting Corporation were seized as they left the palace after testing the Emperor's recording. Together with fourteen other high officials they were held at bayonet point in a small room and questioned for hours as to the whereabouts of the recording.

Marquis Kido and the minister of the Imperial household, Ishiwata, who were in the palace at the time, both narrowly escaped death. After destroying confidential documents, they fled to the underground vault where the Emperor's recording was hidden in a safe. They escaped by hiding there all night while the rebels ransacked the palace seeking the phonograph record. An all-night air raid which made a blackout necessary and forced the insurgents to search by flashlight explains their failure to find the vault.

Rioting troops seized Radio Tokyo and other broadcasting stations, hoping to block the surrender announcement with an appeal to the nation to fight to the death. But the bombing raid then in progress forced the radio stations to stay off the air.

Meanwhile other detachments continued the hunt for the peacemakers. One band raided Kido's home while he was hiding in the palace. Premier Suzuki, warned beforehand, escaped by only a few minutes the machine-gun fire which shattered his official residence. The prime minister's private home was set afire.

The general public was panic-stricken. Thousands of families fled from the city. A group of fanatics protested the surrender by committing mass suicide in front of the palace.

In one of the worst nightmares of all history, bombs continued to fall into this fantastic scene of ringing shots and leaping flames as the giant bombers roared low through the sky, reminding the rebels in this night of terror of the inexorable fate awaiting them.

If this was the chaos which surrender brought even after the path had been eased by the atomic bombs and the Russian declaration of war, how then could the peacemakers have challenged the Suzuki statement which

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blasted apart their carefully planned *coup d'état* on July 27? It is my belief that there was no easy way out after the fatal *mokusatsu* error.

THE State Department and the Pentagon may tell you, as they have told me, that their files show no record of the *mokusatsu* incident. But if you will go to the Library of Congress, you can find there in the Japanese section the documents to confirm the fantastic story.

I saw Kawai again a few weeks ago as I returned from Washington after checking this report there for *Harper's*. He recently resigned his post as editor of the Nippon *Times* and is now teaching Far Eastern affairs at Ohio State University. There, in the American Midwest, we again discussed the strange tale of the *mokusatsu* incident.

"The failure of the Americans to discern the real attitude of the Japanese government toward the Potsdam Declaration, though regrettable, is easy enough to understand and excuse," he said. "But the failure of the Russians to inform their Western allies of Japan's readiness for surrender is something else again. Obviously Russia was determined that Japan should be given no opportunity to surrender until after Russia had declared war on Japan, which was done by citing Suzuki's supposed rejection of the Potsdam ultimatum. To the Japanese government, which had never intended to reject the Potsdam Declaration and which had counted on the Russians to make known to the Allies Japan's readiness to surrender, this was the crowning irony."

Kawai is not the only Japanese who remembers with bitterness the verbal mistake which had such evil results. "Those two characters *mokusatsu* brought greater disaster to Japan than did the atomic bombs," writes former wartime cabinet minister Nobuya Uchida in his memoirs.

Is it not, one wonders, possible that by strengthening the Russian position in the Far East, it brought upon us, too, and upon the world, a chain of troubles?

# *Saying Good-by to a Child*

## SARA VAN ALSTYNE ALLEN

I LOOK into the mirror and I see our two faces replying
To what question, to what inward crying?
You have borrowed the line of brow, the eyes' deep socketing.
Erase the years as the wind the leaves on the bough,
And this young face might be its weary replica
In shape, in intricate design,
But the secret is yours, is mine. We are Two.
The body forgets the living weight that was you.
Then we were One; you the guest, I the shelter,
The darkness, the flowering sun;
You the shelter, I the guest,
At peace on the hidden, the unknown breast.
Smile at me here in this room we have made,
The four walls holding echoes of you,
The infant, the child, the one divided by two,
The self in the seed of that limitless sea.
Beyond sight, beyond light are your thoughts
As you lean to me. You wave as you go,
The slow planet tilting, the stars spilling along your feet,
The lone meteor falling, still hot from your sky,
Making a new world here where you stood
As you said good-by.

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